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ABSTRACT

This profile in outline form of the English language teaching situation in the Netherlands discusses the role of English within Dutch society and within the Dutch educational system. The predominance of English as the main foreign language is pointed out, and its use as medium of instruction at the primary, secondary, university and vocational levels is examined. The make-up of the teaching cadre at all levels is also dealt with, as well as teaching materials, English outside the educational system, and British support for English instruction. A list of documents useful for further reference is provided. A supplementary outline of the current status of literary education and of the literary scene in general accompanies the profile. (CLK)

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ENGLISH-TEACHING INFORMATION CENTRE

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFILE

COUNTRY: Netherlands June 1975

1. The Role of English

1.1 Owing to its small size and to the proximity of three large neighbours, the Netherlands have for long been accustomed to the necessity of learning foreign languages. The common frontier with Germany and the kinship between the peoples and languages made it natural that German should be widely spoken and even more widely understood. The common frontier with French-speaking Belgium in the south-east and, more important, French domination of the country at the beginning of the 19th century resulted in the spread of the French language and wide-spread acceptance of French culture. From the 17th century onwards, maritime, colonial and commercial rivalry with Britain made necessary a knowledge of English. As a result of these many factors it became customary, and necessary, for educated Dutchmen to have some knowledge of English, French and German and all three languages were included as compulsory subjects in the secondary school curriculum. Equal attention was paid to all three languages, but the post-war predominance of English as the first world language was quickly recognised by the Dutch and English has now become the first foreign language of the country. Secondary school students are now required to choose only one foreign language for the final examination and 95% opt for English.

1.2 As with other European countries, the Netherlands are now without imperial ramifications. They do, however, through the multinational companies with headquarters in the Netherlands possess powerful commercial influence on the international scene. In these enterprises, as in others, English marches along with Dutch. A young Dutchman could hardly contemplate a commercial, industrial or technological career equipped with his own language alone.

1.3 The Netherlands offer a number of tertiary level courses, notably in agriculture and technology, specifically designed for an international clientele, mainly from the developing world. The medium of instruction on these courses is English. It is not uncommon for English to be the medium in 'normal' universities, especially where the teacher is from outside the Netherlands and has not yet had time to learn Dutch.

1.4 English Departments in universities use English as the medium of instruction, as indeed do other departments, particularly at postgraduate level, where the textbook material is mainly in English.

1.5 Films and television programmes made in Britain and the USA are shown in the original language, with Dutch sub-titles. The exposure to English in this way is so strong as to constitute an inescapable cultural influence, for better or for worse. The 'passive' knowledge of English must be as high in the Netherlands as in any other West European country.

2. English within the Educational System

2.1 Although the teaching of foreign languages is not yet compulsory at the primary school level, a few primary schools make provision for such

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teaching, in English or French, as an (optional) extra subject.

2.2 While English has always held its place, along with German and French, as a subject in the academic secondary schools, it is now also studied by almost all pupils in the vastly larger non-academic sector. It is also studied in the secondary vocational schools. In consequence of this extension there has been a very marked shift away from the 'grammar-translation' method of teaching towards methods better adapted for the larger numbers of pupils and the greater range of ability now being dealt with. At all levels of English teaching in schools, practical competence in the language is given the main emphasis, with listening comprehension foremost.

2.3 University departments of English in the Netherlands have always been particularly strong in philology and Dutch scholars have made notable contributions in this field. Although less time is now devoted to Old Norse, Gothic and Anglo-Saxon, there is still a marked bias towards language rather than literature in some departments. In literature studies the emphasis is on classical authors but in several university departments the study of contemporary works and Commonwealth literature is encouraged. It may be said that in Dutch universities foreign language study is more detailed and thorough than in the United Kingdom, but it should be borne in mind that students normally spend a minimum of five years before obtaining their degree. There are departments of English at the universities of Amsterdam, Leiden, Groningen, Utrecht, Nijmegen and the Free University of Amsterdam. Some instruction in English language is given also in the Economic and Technical universities of the country.

2.4 Teaching staff both in universities and schools have complete freedom in the choice of textbooks and other material, and the recommendations of the Inspectorate are not binding. In general, the Inspectorate's role is principally administrative.

2.5 Most vocational schools and colleges of further education give instruction in English.

2.6 The Volksuniversiteit provides evening courses, especially in vocational subjects, and its role is most close to that of the evening classes organised by Local Education Authorities. By comparison with the United Kingdom, however, there is little organised education for adults in the Netherlands. A few Parent-Teacher Associations or private schools may provide evening classes in English and other subjects. Municipalities occasionally provide grants to these organisations, but this is on an ad hoc basis.

3. Teaching Cadre

3.1 Few foreign teachers are found in Dutch schools. Foreign-born academics are however, quite numerous, particularly in the field of English teaching, where Dutch universities are particularly liberal in the recognition of British qualifications and also in the provision of permanent rather than contract appointments. Every university English department employs senior as well as junior British staff and the new Teacher Training Institutes all have three or four British lecturers. Recruitment is arranged by the institutions themselves.

3.2 There is an extensive scheme for in-service training for secondary modern and lower technical teachers of English. The scheme is in three phases: in the first part the teachers receive weekly instruction from Dutch tutors, the second part is held in conjunction with the British Council and comprises a two-week course under the supervision of Dutch

and British tutors, and the third part is a course of three weeks in the United Kingdom. Attendance at the in-service courses is voluntary.

3.3 The main professional organisation for teachers of languages is the Vereniging van Leraren in Levende Talen which provides a forum through journals and conferences for teachers of foreign languages.

4. Teaching Materials

4.1 Books are provided to children at primary school levels. In the secondary schools the student pays a quarter of the cost of each textbook which he has to return at the end of a year.

4.2 There is no real shortage of textbooks but the books used will vary from school to school. The most widely used British produced English courses are Alexander's 'New Concept English', the Broughton (Penguin) 'Success with English' series and Candlin's 'Present Day English for Foreign Students'. There is no central scheme for the selection of materials. Some schools use taped materials and a few have language laboratories. The provision of educational aids and functional materials is at the individual discretion of each school.

5. English outside the Educational System

5.1 There are a large number of private schools and institutions giving instruction in foreign languages. No inspection of private schools is carried out by the Netherlands Ministry of Education and Sciences. A list of language schools in the Netherlands with courses for Cambridge examinations and a list of English-medium schools are to be seen in ETIC Archives.

5.2 Some universities provide their own courses for foreign students (eg the Free University in Amsterdam) and the SBBS (the Dutch organisation looking after the welfare of foreign students in the Netherlands) provides regular courses in English language.

6. British Support for the Teaching of English

6.1 Between 1973 and 1975, there was a British Council English Language Officer in the Netherlands, but from September 1975 onwards, there will be no ELT post.

At present some 40 - 50 British lecturers in English are employed in Dutch universities and teacher training institutes.

6.2 An important concern of the British Council is support, both locally and in the UK, for the 3-phase in-service training scheme mentioned in 3.2 above. The Council recruits tutors for the course held annually in Britain. During the past year (74-75) further support was provided by bringing out Dr Geoffrey Broughton to visit the various Phase 1 in-service training groups.

6.3 During the past year (74-75), Mr Ian Dunlop lectured on teaching methodology to students and staff of the teacher training institutes. It is hoped that the Council will over the coming years be able to assist these institutes by bringing out visiting lecturers, and arranging staff and student exchanges with similar institutions in Britain.

6.4 Advice on English teaching problems is informally given at the Council office to the many teachers who have a continuous contact with the Council.

6.5 Such ELT films as are available, notably 'View and Teach' and 'The Scientist Speaks' have been widely used, but there now seems to be a need for new material.

7. General Statement

7.1 The predominance of English as the main foreign language in the Netherlands is beyond question. What is also beyond question is that we are here in a dynamic, expanding situation. After the powerful expansion of English learning in secondary schools, we can now look forward to the introduction of English in the top two classes of primary schools. Financial restraints mean that this change will not be completely implemented until 1985. However, the necessarily large training programme that will precede this major step, will probably begin in 1979. It is expected that the Council will be involved.

7.2 The theoretical side of English teaching is being increasingly well looked after by the university departments of applied linguistics. The research being carried out in these institutions relates closely to fields like secondary school leaving examinations and teacher training. As far as English teaching is concerned, it is no longer useful to consider university activities as being a separate entity residing in an ivory tower.

8. Current Research and Bibliography

8.1 The following documents are for further reference:
Language schools in the Netherlands with courses for Cambridge Certificates;
English-medium Schools in the Netherlands;
Some British people teaching in the Netherlands;
The Netherlands Education System (prepared by Miss H D Leitch, Assistant Representative, 1969/71);
Memorandum following my visit to schools in the Netherlands (Mr H Taylor, Institute of Education, University of Leeds);
Tertiary Education in the Netherlands: Discussion Points in 1972;
Professors in English Language and Literature at Netherlands Universities;
The position and nature of the teaching of English in Higher Education establishments in the Netherlands in 1972 (Professor Bachrach, University of Leiden);
Two articles from NRC-Handelsblad, concerning the use of foreign languages in the universities.
Summary of the Post-Primary Education Act in the Netherlands;
Report on visit to the Netherlands by British HMIs, February/March 1970;
Comparative Education Study Tour to Holland, Easter 1969 (report by Mr R A Ramsay, Department of Education and Psychology, Dundee College of Education);

This profile should be read in conjunction with the Netherlands Education Profile.

ELT PROFILE: NETHERLANDS

LITERATURE ANNEX July 1976

1. Status of Literature

There is a wide aquaintance with English literature in the Netherlands and English Literature - whether of British or American origin - is the most important here after Dutch Literature. Interest in English Literature extends far beyond the school or university classrooms.

2. Literary Education

2.1 In the Netherlands it is impossible to differentiate between state and private education, the latter of which extends to 70% of all schools. All forms of school whether private or state receive 100% grants from public sources. The teaching of English Literature in secondary schools is almost entirely at the discretion of the individual school or teacher.

2.2 School-leaving examinations are set internally. There will be little literature content in the secondary modern (MAVO) school, the situation in the HAVO school will be extremely variable, whereas in the VWO (academic) school some literature has to be taught. In this last type at least two major periods of English Literature should be studied but this might be done purely by studying two authors eg Charles Dickens and H G Wells.

2.3 The Modern Languages Teachers Association (Vereniging van Leraren in Levende Talen) is divided into various sections and the English section is currently attempting to rejuvenate itself. The Association is however more concerned with language skills and methodology than with literature although there is some literary activity.

2.4 Some schools will use simplified or abridged texts - more traditional teachers, and particularly those in the VWO schools may tend to concentrate on more extensive reading of English classics; there is no norm however.

2.5 English Literature is only studied in English Departments and for the forthcoming academic year there will be almost 1000 new undergraduates in university Departments of English. In the teacher training institutes there will be about the same number of students opting for English as one of their two teaching subjects.

2.6 The degree courses in literature tend to be based on periods and genre but the periods covered in depth will vary from department to department. By the time a student takes his "doctoraal" examination in English in the Netherlands he will have had the opportunity to be as widely read as a British student completing a BA course. There is less emphasis than in Britain on essay-writing and there is probably slightly less emphasis here on students' original ideas as opposed to the regurgitation of material and certainly most students are far less capable than their British counterparts of arranging literary arguments in written form.

2.7 The university degree structure in the Netherlands is very different to that in Britain and students take what is called the "kandidaats" examination after three years study and thereafter tend to specialise in specific directions, eg literature, development of language, linguistics. The study culminates in a short dissertation which should involve slightly

deeper study than that expected of a British tutorial essay in the final undergraduate year. After the "kandidaats" examination it should officially take two years but often takes between three to five years to obtain the "doctoraal" examination which can be equated roughly to a British Masters degree by examination. A very few students then continue for a doctorate but this is normally combined, at least in the Humanities, with a full-time university or other teaching post and candidates who eventually present their doctorates are often in their late 30's or early 40's. The standard of the English sections in the university libraries and the departmental libraries in Departments of English varies considerably - the Universities of Amsterdam and Leiden have the most extensive facilities.

3. Literary Scene

3.1 The teaching of Dutch in secondary schools is not dissimilar to the teaching of English. Being the mother-tongue, particularly in the academic schools wider reading will be expected than in English but this will be extremely variable. There is a small number of Dutch writers who also write in English but this is not the general rule. Societies exist for the promotion of Dutch Literature abroad, in translation, and there is an obvious need for more Dutch Literature to be translated if it is to achieve a more international readership.

3.2 There is some specialist local publishing in English but very little literature in English. A substantial number of modern British novels are translated into Dutch and achieve considerable sales. The quality of translations varies considerably as one might expect but there are a number of dedicated and enthusiastic translators eg the translations of the works of James Joyce have been quite outstanding.

3.3 English Literature both in translation and in the original is widely available throughout the country in both libraries and bookshops. The emphasis is on paperbacks although the academic bookshops will normally have books available as soon as they are published in Britain. In addition a number of the more serious newspapers review English Literature as early as it is reviewed in the British press.